

VZCZCXRO8104
OO RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHVJ #2307/01 2721220
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 291220Z SEP 06 ZFX
FM AMEMBASSY SARAJEVO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4514
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JCS WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SARAJEVO 002307

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR (DICARLO), EUR/SCE, P (BAME); NSC FOR BRAUN;
OSD FOR FLORY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/01/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [BK](#)

SUBJECT: BOSNIA ON ELECTION EVE - EVOLUTION, REVOLUTION,
AND CONFUSION

REF: A. SARAJEVO 2280
[1](#)B. SARAJEVO 2279
[1](#)C. SARAJEVO 2277
[1](#)D. SARAJEVO 2160
[1](#)E. SARAJEVO 2060
[1](#)F. SARAJEVO 1962
[1](#)G. SARAJEVO 1916
[1](#)H. SARAJEVO 1891
[1](#)I. SARAJEVO 1852
[1](#)J. SARAJEVO 2305

SARAJEVO 00002307 001.5 OF 003

Classified By: Ambassador Douglas L. McElhaney. Reaons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) This is the final in a series of planned pre-election telegrams.

[1](#)2. (C) SUMMARY: Bosnians go to the polls in two days, October 1, to elect their national and entity governments (Ref E). International observers and Bosnian officials expect an orderly and fair election, though lingering concerns about fraud exist in parts of the country (Ref A and C). Preliminary results will be available at midnight that evening, but in the past these have not always been reliable. At noon on October 2, the Central Election Commission will release final vote tallies. Going into election weekend, the race for the Bosniak member of the Tri-Presidency, which has been marked by a shift in Bosniak politics to the right, is too close to call. The final days of the campaign may have seen a shift of momentum in favor of the incumbent, Sulejman Tihic, however. Among the Serbs, Milorad Dodik's Alliance of Independent Social Democrats appears poised for a big win that would sweep his opponents, the Serb Democratic Party, from power for the first time since 1991. The Croat picture is confused. Pro- and anti-constitutional reform parties are duking it out in what amounts to the first truly competitive contest among Croats since 1991. Victories by more nationalist candidates among the Bosniaks and Croats will complicate our efforts to restart constitutional reform talks after the elections as well as our broader reform agenda over the longer-term. An extended period of negotiations aimed at forming coalition governments may also dominate post-election politics. Our immediate post election challenge may be keeping issues on an otherwise crowded political agenda in order to ensure that we are ready to press ahead once the dust settles. END SUMMARY.

Bosniaks: Moving to the Right

¶3. (SBU) Party for BiH (SBiH) leader and candidate for the Bosniak member of the Tri-Presidential Haris Silajdzic has staked his candidacy on opposition to the March package of constitutional amendments. He has also skillfully exploited Serbian nationalist campaign rhetoric by Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) leader Milorad Dodik to raise doubts among Bosniak voters about the ability of his principal opponent, Party for Democratic Action (SDA) Sulejman Tihic, to protect their interests (Ref E and F). For much of the campaign, Reis Ceric, the leader of Bosnia's Islamic Community, and Dnevni Avaz, a leading Sarajevo-based daily, have tacitly supported Silajdzic and provided important momentum to his Presidential bid.

¶4. (SBU) The anti-Tihic rhetoric from the Reis and Dnevi Avaz has cooled over the past week, however, after Bakir Izetbegovic, SDA Vice President and son of revered former President Alija Izetbegovic, broke an inexplicably long public silence and praised Tihic's work ethic and leadership. And in recent days, Avaz has featured more favorable stories on Tihic, and on September 28, the paper published a full-page color ad for the Tihic campaign. In the meantime, Tihic has sought to counter Silajdzic with his own nationalist rhetoric, notably his defense of former Bosnian Fifth Army Commander Dudakovic, who Serbs accuse of war crimes (Ref I). Tihic has also campaigned tirelessly among ordinary Bosniak voters in an effort to exploit his image as a "man of the people" compared to the urbane and aloof Silajdzic. The upshot: two days before the elections, most observers give Silajdzic a slight edge, but consider the race for the Bosniak member of the Tri-Presidency too close to call.

¶5. (SBU) Few people believe Silajdzic has long coattails,

SARAJEVO 00002307 002.7 OF 003

however. As a consequence, most observers expect the relative balance of power between the SDA and SBiH in the State-level House of Representatives (10 seats to 6, respectively) to remain the same. The Social Democratic Party (SDP) might pick up a seat in the HoR, but even so, it would remain the smallest of the three major Bosniak parties in parliament. Nonetheless, the SDP would be large enough to be a potential coalition partner for the SDA. The Bosniak political picture is less clear at the Federation and cantonal levels, where local issues and personalities may drive outcomes. Rural voters and those from smaller Bosniak cities could stay with the SDA or embrace Bosniak nationalist pitches if the sum of their fears outweighs their traditional loyalties. If the latter, this would impact the balance of forces among the Bosniak caucus in the State-level House of Peoples (Ref I).

Serbs: All Hail the Conquering Hero

¶6. (SBU) Within the Republika Srpska (RS), pre-election prognostications are not focused on what party will win the most seats in the State-level HoR or the RS National Assembly (RSNA). Everyone agrees that Dodik's SNSD will defeat current RS President Dragan Cavic's Serb Democratic Party (SDS). The consuming political question is how big Dodik's victory will be. According to a USAID-funded poll, the Serb electorate perceives Dodik as the man best positioned to secure the RS's future by battling crime and corruption and implementing economic reforms. The same experts predict, paradoxically, that Dodik's command of the RS political stage and his party's growing lead over the SDS could drive SNSD turn out up (Note: Generally, experts predict an overall turnout comparable to 2002, approximately 55%. End Note).

¶7. (SBU) During the final week of the campaign, Dodik's confidence has been almost palpable. He has increasingly talked as if he expects to govern the RS, occasionally

hinting that he might do so without coalition partners. He has also stressed that SNSD expected to play a role in State-level government commensurate with its electoral success (i.e., as Chair of the Council of Ministers). OHR HighRep Schwarz-Schilling's comments in Vienna that he may sanction Dodik if he plans an RS referendum rallied Serb voters to his side providing him with additional momentum going into the last week of the campaign. Two days before the election, SNSD appears poised to grab the Serb member of the Tri-Presidency and put Cavic out of a job by winning the RS Presidency. While winning an outright majority in the RSNA may be a bridge too far for SNSD, a revolution in RS politics appears to be in the offing.

Croats: Man Versus Machine

¶8. (SBU) If Bosniak politics is evolving and Serb politics are poised for a revolution, confusion reigns among the Croats. Since 1991, the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia-Herzegovina (HDZ-BiH) has dominated Croat politics, but the party split in March over constitutional reform. At the time, the split did not appear fatal, but in September the new party, HDZ-1990, was openly endorsed by Croatian PM Sanader and tacitly endorsed by Cardinal Puljic (Ref B). Since then, HDZ-1990 and its anti-constitutional reform message have been picking up support in Herzegovina. With Croat politics now in uncharted territory and a plethora of smaller political parties seeking to capitalize on the confusion and propel themselves into the first rank of Croat politics, few in Herzegovina are comfortable making predictions about the election's outcome.

¶9. (SBU) Nonetheless, two days before the election, Ivo Miro Jovic and Bozo Ljubic, the HDZ-BiH and HDZ-1990 candidates for the Croat member of the Tri-Presidency, are publicly perceived as running neck and neck, and many observers believe the two parties will split the traditional 5/6 Croat seats in the HoR among them. If HDZ-1990 is relying on Croat nationalism and high-profile public endorsements to carry its cause, HDZ-BiH is hoping its well-established and efficient political machine will prevail in the end. At the local level, in the races for the cantonal assemblies, this could be the case. As with Bosniak politics, the outcome in the cantons will impact the composition of the Croat caucus in

SARAJEVO 00002307 003.5 OF 003

the House of Peoples, potentially cementing in place a nationalist blocking majority.

¶10. (SBU) Another wild card in Croat politics is Social Democratic Party (SDP) Zeljko Komsic's candidacy for the Croat member of the Tri-Presidency (Ref B). Anxiety is growing among Croat parties and voters that the SDP's traditionally loyal voters, coupled with multiple candidacies among the Croat parties themselves will propel Komsic to victory. The Sarajevo-based Komsic does not need to win all 110,000 to 140,000 projected SDP voters if Jovic and Ljubic split the approximately 150,000 to 180,000 Croat electorate among themselves. This week, Zvonko Jurisic, Croat Party of Rights (HSP) Tri-Presidency candidate, also reportedly began a late surge, presumably at the expense of Jovic and Ljubic. His gains, if real, would further split the Croat vote. Efforts to rally Croat parties around a single candidate have predictably failed amid clashes of competing egos.

Comment: What Does All This Mean

¶11. (C) Our immediate post-election priority remains constitutional reform agenda. In that context, the most significant October 1 electoral races are those for the Bosniak and Croat members of the Tri-Presidency and the contest between HDZ and HDZ-1990 for the hearts and minds of Herzegovina. Silajdzic and Ljubic wins as well as a big nigh for HDZ-1990 would certainly complicate constitutional

reform. Over the longer term, these results would also likely complicate the usual triangular negotiations required to reach consensus on other issues, such as police reform. In any case, mixed results in the Federation coupled with a clear Dodik win might herald a longer period of post-election coalition building, which could consume politicians for weeks (Ref J). Losses by the traditional "big three" of Bosnian politics -- the SDA, HDZ, and SDS -- could/could also result in leadership changes that further preoccupy the parties and have a significant impact on the tone of Bosnian politics. Imagine, for example, an SDA led by a more overtly nationalist figure than the moderate Tihic. Our immediate post election challenge may be keeping issues on an otherwise crowded political agenda in order to ensure that we are ready to press ahead once the dust settles.

MCELHANEY